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18 March 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Discussion with Secretary McNamara and Secretary Vance concerning Aerial Reconnaissance over Communist China

1. I reported that recent problems with the drones causing the loss of 3 of them and the MIG 21 attack on the March 14th U-2 mission, which apparently (though not absolutely confirmed) involved 3 air-to-air missile firings, led to the conclusion that:

a. The use of U-2's over Communist China is becoming increasingly hazardous because of SAMS and MIG 21 attack techniques;

b. The recent problems with drones may cause an hiatus in the activity which would necessitate use of U-2's for South China coverage of priority targets east of Kunming.

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With respect to drones, the cause of the troubles has not as yet been determined but it is felt [redacted] and the manufacturer that a ChiCom jamming of the drone guidance system is highly unlikely. (In a separate conversation [redacted] confirmed this; said 4 or 5 drones were ready; a team was in the field to examine trouble; production of new drones - 1 per week.)

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2. USIB, in considering the problem on March 17th, reaffirmed the necessity for continuing aerial reconnaissance of South China. Secretaries McNamara and Vance concurred in this judgment.

3. Therefore it was decided to continue the use of U-2's on priority targets west of Kunming and to extend this coverage to all of South China if drone operations are temporarily stood down. There was no disagreement that the need for intelligence outweighed the risk.

It was further agreed that we should proceed immediately with all preparatory steps necessary to operate the OXCART over Communist China, flying out of Okinawa. It was agreed that we should proceed with all construction and related arrangements. However this decision did not authorize the deployment of the OXCART to Okinawa nor the decision to fly the OXCART over Communist China. The decision would authorize all preparatory steps and the expenditure of such funds as might be involved.

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NOTE: After some discussion it was decided that Okinawa was preferable to Formosa and no steps are to be taken in anticipation of deploying the OXCART to Formosa unless it is considered advisable to prepare a runway to provide an alternate emergency landing base.

6. With respect to reliability, I expressed grave concern over the reliability of the plane, pointing out that at speeds of MACH 3 - 3.25 and at 80,000 feet, we have encountered a series of unanticipated difficulties and that I did not think that the plane was fully "debugged." I indicated a number of planes would be ready for operations by September, one plane might be ready considerably in advance of that date, but that I would give no positive estimate until I had gone to the site with a number of experts and reviewed the situation carefully myself.

7. These decisions authorize all arrangements and the expenditure of funds necessary in connection with anticipated operations of the OXCART out of Okinawa by either CIA or the Air Force. DDCI should confer with Secretary Vance or his designee concerning these arrangements. Planes themselves should not be deployed and the final decision to fly the planes over Communist China will not be made at this time.

The question of pilot pay should be discussed by DDCI and Secretary Vance. The question of secrecy of operations should be thoroughly explored before decision made on the CIA-Air Force problem.

JAM/mfb

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